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Mayor announces new citizen-based crime fighting programs

CANTON, Ohio – At a news conference Tuesday morning, Mayor William Healy announced three new crime initiatives designed to increase citizen involvement in law enforcement activities and support the efforts of neighborhood crime watch groups throughout the city. The initiatives, which prominently feature use of technology and communications tools, will strengthen ties between community activists and the police department in order to further drive down Canton's plummeting crime rate. Crime in Canton fell by 19.5% in 2009, resulting in a 30% drop in crime over two years.

"Much of our success over the past two years was driven in part by residents who became more active in their community and took a greater role in the safety of their neighborhoods," Healy said. "In order to do their jobs effectively, our officers need cooperation and support from city residents. These programs are designed to strengthen communication between law enforcement and neighborhood activists so that we can more successfully target criminal activity and remove it from our community."

The three programs announced at Tuesday's news conference are listed below.

- **Canton's Most Wanted** – Through a partnership between the Canton Police Department, Canton City Schools Channel 11, and Time Warner Cable Government Access Channel 15, residents can now become an extra set of eyes and ears for police by staying on the look-out for suspected criminals identified by police as "Canton's Most Wanted." The program, which begins this evening at 8:00 p.m. on Channel 15 and runs every day at Noon and 8:00 p.m. for one-hour periods, will feature between 10 and 15 individuals currently wanted on outstanding warrants by the Canton Police Department. Residents are encouraged to call police dispatch with information leading to the arrest of pictured suspects, as many suspected criminals could be dangerous. An updated list of most wanted suspects can also be accessed on the City of Canton's Web site 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at www.cantonohio.gov/wanted.

"More often than not, the criminals we're looking for are living among us right here in the city," said Chief Dean McKimm. "But if nobody knows that the police are looking for them, there is little chance they will be turned in. With this program, we want to get the word out that we are taking a more aggressive stance against those who commit crime in our city and encourage residents to take an active role in bringing these individuals to justice."

- **Nixle Alerts — Police Updates via SMS, E-mail, and Twitter**
The days of listening in on police radio scanners to stay on top of area law enforcement activity are now obsolete thanks to a new online service that delivers text message alerts to residents via cell phone (SMS), e-mail, and Twitter feed. Warnings and notifications about suspected criminal activity, traffic issues, Amber Alerts, and more can be delivered directly to citizens in seconds using a free online service called Nixle, now available at www.nixle.com. Registered users will receive messages tailored to specific interests based upon their geographic location in the city, allowing police to get the word out in the most efficient means possible to large groups of residents in any particular area.



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“Residents are used to using modern technology to communicate with each other every day,” said Police Captain Dave Davis. “There is no reason the department should not use that same technology to get our message out to them as well. It’s simple, it’s free, and most importantly - it works.”

- **I-SPI Crime Cameras** – Residents who are having problems with crime in their neighborhoods and want to take action can now turn to a free service offered by the Canton Police Department to help identify and arrest those responsible. I-SPI (Invited Surveillance for Police Investigations) allows residents to literally become a second set of eyes for police by permitting the installation of temporary surveillance cameras on their private property to catch suspected criminals in the act. The program, which is 100% voluntary, strikes at the heart of criminal behavior by creating black-and-white evidence that a crime has occurred. The footage, which can only be reviewed by police investigators and is not available for review by program participants, will be used to identify, arrest, and prosecute those responsible for committing criminal acts.

“Videotape footage from surveillance or security cameras is about as close to a slam-dunk as you can get in the police world,” said Chief Dean McKimm. “A number of recent high-profile cases were solved in part thanks to the use of video surveillance technology. This program allows us to focus our attention on a specific area without drawing the attention that a permanent camera would bring. Criminals will never know if they are being videotaped, and will hopefully begin to act accordingly.”

All three programs are low-cost solutions to solving crime problems in some of Canton’s most troubled neighborhoods. Both Nixle and the Canton’s Most Wanted program are free, and the I-SPI crime camera program will be paid for using funds obtained through sales of drug-related property seized by police.

“They don’t know it yet, but drug dealers are paying for the cameras that will eventually catch them in the act,” said Mayor Healy. “We are always looking for new ways to reduce the effect crime has on taxpayers’ pocketbooks, and this is a great way to do that.”

Nixle Alerts and the Canton’s Most Wanted program are already active and available for citizen participation. The I-SPI crime camera program is currently in test phase, with a pilot location established at the Monroe Community Center, where the news conference took place.

“We want to make sure we have all the kinks worked out of the system before we start taking this program out in the neighborhoods,” McKimm said. “Once we have the program running smoothly, we will begin filling requests on a first-come, first-serve basis for the cameras.”

McKimm said that a full list of requirements, forms, and agreements will be posted to the Canton Police Department’s Web site at www.cantonohio.gov/police when the program leaves test phases and is available to the general public.

“We anticipate that this will generate a fair amount of interest in some of our most highly affected neighborhoods,” McKimm said. “We only hope that we can keep up with the demand.”

For more information about the crime programs unveiled today, visit www.cantonohio.gov/police or call (330) 489-3111. To report non-emergency suspected criminal activity, residents should call police dispatch at (330) 649-5800 24/7. For police emergencies, residents should always dial 9-1-1.

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